

VZCZCXRO1307
OO RUEH DU RUEHRN
DE RUEHMR #0608/01 3241619
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
O P 201619Z NOV 07
FM AMEMBASSY MASERU
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 3449
INFO RUCNSAD/SOUTHERN AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY
RUEHMR/AMEMBASSY MASERU 3850

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MASERU 000608

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/20/2017

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [EAID](#) [LT](#)

SUBJECT: LESOTHO PM TO AMBASSADOR: "THANK YOU FOR STAYING THE COURSE"

REF: A) MASERU 607; B) MASERU 563

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CLASSIFIED BY: Ambassador Robert B. Nolan, COM., EXEC, DOS.
REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: During the Ambassador's November 19 initial courtesy call on Lesotho Prime Minister Mosisili, the PM expressed deep appreciation for 41 years of an uninterrupted USG presence in the mountain kingdom and for American generosity over the years, including programs in the areas of health and education, the contributions of Peace Corps Volunteers, and the recently signed MCA compact. An otherwise gracious Mosisili expressed displeasure over the political opposition's various strategies to encourage a suspension of foreign assistance, including the MCA compact, but he was pleased to hear that the United States views the country's post-election impasse as largely an internal matter for Lesotho. Mosisili is clearly supportive of the visible and productive American presence in Lesotho (including USG programs and initiatives, but also U.S.-based NGOs). This initial courtesy call was successful in establishing a personal connection with the PM, one that will help form the basis for the further strengthening of bilateral relations and advancing USG interests. Mosisili's appreciation for the United States "staying the course" in Lesotho reiterated once again the benefits of universality and a broad USG presence in Africa. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) On November 19, Ambassador Nolan made an initial courtesy call on Lesotho's Prime Minister, Pakalitha Mosisili. Although the two had met briefly in Washington in July during the signing of Lesotho's Millennium Challenge Account compact, PM Mosisili was on a visit to China when the Ambassador presented his credentials to the King in October (ref B). DCM accompanied the Ambassador; Mosisili was joined by Minister to the PM's Office (and Acting Foreign Minister) Motloheloa Phooko and Government Secretary Tlohang Sekhamane.

¶3. (SBU) Responding to the Ambassador's observation that the Basotho people have a warmth for Americans, PM Mosisili said it was "not without reason." The Basotho, Mosisili said, appreciated that the United States had "stayed the course" after the advent of democracy in South Africa in 1994, when many other countries abandoned their missions in Maseru and relocated to Pretoria, "as if to say that Lesotho had been a mere outpost to watch South Africa." The flight of many embassies in the 1990s "didn't go over well with our people," noted Mosisili.

¶4. (SBU) Mosisili, offering a Basotho proverb that "the giver forgets easily, but the receiver never forgets," expressed deep appreciation for American generosity over the years. He noted that he, like many other members of his cabinet, had received an post-secondary education in the United States "which has in turn served our country very well." (Note: PM Mosisili obtained a

Master's at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.) The Prime Minister also observed that Peace Corps Volunteers "have been with us for many years," helping achieve advances in education and health, among other fields. He recounted that then-PM Chief Leabua Jonathan did a "traditional dance" for the first group of Volunteers who arrived in 1967, shortly after independence. (Note: Peace Corps recently celebrated 40 years of uninterrupted service in Lesotho. End Note.)

15. (C) Turning his attention to the MCA compact, Mosisili said he had experienced a "rush of emotions" at the July signing in Washington with Secretary Rice. "Since time immemorial," said the PM, "no one has come forward for Lesotho like the United States has through MCC." Responding to the Ambassador's observation that Lesotho had worked hard to qualify for MCC assistance, Mosisili said "the steps we took to meet eligibility were easy, because they were the right steps to take."

16. (C) The Prime Minister raised the political opposition's recent negative comments regarding the MCA compact, calling their walk-out at Parliament over a motion thanking the United States "truly unacceptable" (ref A). Calling the opposition strategy "absurd," he offered his view that the MCA compact will have a huge impact on the average Masotho. "How can anyone in their right mind oppose such a gift?" asked Mosisili. The Ambassador gave Mosisili assurances that while he remained open to hearing the views of the opposition, the USG had no intention of cutting of foreign assistance as a result of Lesotho's post-election impasse, an internal matter. The United States was, to the contrary, pleased to observe that Lesotho's judiciary enjoyed substantial independence, and that election-related issues had been referred to the courts. Mosisili agreed, noting that the High Court had that day taken up a case related to allocation of parliamentary seats. "We hope this will be resolved by the end of the year," the PM concluded, "and when the Court speaks, we are obliged to listen."

17. (C) Comment: PM Mosisili was relaxed and at ease, displaying no signs of stress related to the opposition's nagging post-election grievances or to recent rumors about turf battles within his governing LCD political party. Instead, he exuded

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the confidence and warmth for which he is well known and highly respected within Lesotho and among his SADC colleagues. Mosisili, who was pleased to hear that the opposition's calls for a suspension of foreign assistance does not resonate with the United States, is clearly supportive of the visible and productive American presence in Lesotho (including USG programs and initiatives, but also U.S.-based NGOs). This initial courtesy call was successful in establishing a personal connection with the PM, one that will help form the basis for the further strengthening of bilateral relations and advancing USG interests. Mosisili's appreciation for the United States "staying the course" in Lesotho reiterated once again the benefits of universality and a broad USG presence in Africa. End Comment.
NOLAN